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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8456
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RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 0664
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RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID 2206
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 1012
RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN 0679
RUEHPG/AMEMBASSY PRAGUE 0234
RUEHSM/AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM 0072
RHMFISS/HQ USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NOUAKCHOTT 000356

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [MR](#)

SUBJECT: ROSSO'S TOWN HALL: AGREEING TO DISAGREE

REF: A. 08 NOUAKCHOTT 682

[1](#)B. 09 NOUAKCHOTT 124

[1](#)C. 09 NOUAKCHOTT 312

Classified By: Ambassador Mark M. Boulware for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: During a meeting at the town hall in Rosso, EmbOffs witnessed spirited but respectful political debates between the Secretary General, who expressed support for General Aziz, and a Deputy Mayor, who advocated constitutional order. Such free debate indicates a willingness to coexist at the local level despite political differences. But there may be limits to such dissent, particularly when a mayor has adopted a strong anti-coup position and attracted the attention of the authorities in the capital Nouakchott. End summary.

[1](#)2. (C) PolOff and PolAsst met May 19 with the Secretary General of Rosso El Hadj M'Bodj and Deputy Mayor Madame Diakher. (Note: The mayor of Rosso was in Nouakchott. End note.) This visit to the mayor's office was part of a larger effort to get a readout of the situation outside of Nouakchott ahead of June 6 elections (Septel).

[1](#)3. (C) The coup supporter: Secretary General M'Bodj expressed strong support for Aziz. (Comment: In a previous meeting with PolAsst in November 2008 (Ref A), M'Bodj wanted to avoid political discussions altogether. In a February 2009 meeting with PolOff (Ref B), M'Bodj was more willing to express political opinions. In this meeting however, his support for Aziz was overt -- perhaps because Aziz's victory in upcoming "elections" is all but assured now. End comment.) M'Bodj maintained that Aziz had raised the issue of the "passif humanitaire," something he claimed no one had ever done before. (Note: The "passif humanitaire" is the euphemism used in Mauritania to refer to the arbitrary arrests, deportations, and mass killings of Afro-Mauritanians in the early 1990s. President Abdallahi had in fact launched an initiative to address this problem while in office. End note.) M'Bodj condemned the anti-coup opposition, saying that they had little domestic support and had to use the international community as their sole protector. M'Bodj also gave strong support to the upcoming elections, saying the electoral agenda had been determined during the "National Dialogue on Democracy." He denied that the military had unilaterally set the agenda, arguing that RFD President Ahmed

Ould Daddah at the time had participated in the "National Dialogue" as well. (Comment: M'Bodj conveniently ignored the fact that Daddah and the RFD withdrew from the "National Dialogue" after determining it was being manipulated by the junta and that its discussions were not being conducted in good faith. End comment.) M'Bodj mentioned that a high participation rate would validate the election. "What would happen if 51% of the people decide to vote?" he said. He did, however, state that the post-election situation in the country would be a "great unknown," adding that Mauritania could not survive prolonged international isolation.

14. (C) The coup opponent: Diakher remained silent for most of the meeting, but spoke up towards the end, at one point entering into a spirited debate (in Wolof) with M'Bodj about the political situation. Whereas M'Bodj was an Aziz supporter, Diakher expressed an anti-coup position. She said the constitution should be used to fix Mauritania's problems, not coups d'etat. Her preferred solution to the crisis was gathering all the parliamentary deputies around a table to arrive at a consensual solution. She asserted that if the June 6 elections imposed by Aziz went ahead, there would be "no more democracy" in Mauritania. On economic matters, Secretary General M'Bodj stated that although the economic situation was "difficult," there was not a food security crisis. Diakher, on the other hand, had a bleaker assessment of the situation, which she labeled as "extremely difficult," especially for rural people. Listing problems such as crop-eating birds and resource-intensive crops, she said people were "very hungry."

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15. (C) Comment: Town councils frequently contain members from a diverse range of political parties and ethnic groups. Although sharp differences emerged among the political class in the wake of Aziz's coup, town councils have had to learn to coexist despite these divisions. Nevertheless, external pressures (typically originating from Nouakchott) can upset the balance. This was recently witnessed when two anti-coup mayors in Nema and Sava were forced out of office by their own municipal councils, allegedly after pro-coup partisans in Nouakchott orchestrated their dismissal (Ref C, para 16). It may be that political dissent within town councils is tolerated, as long as the mayor is sufficiently pro-coup. Anti-coup mayors, on the other hand, attract the attention of the powers-that-be in Nouakchott and are in a decidedly more precarious position. End comment.
BOULWARE